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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 180 (2015) 1692 – 1697

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

The 6th International Conference Edu World 2014 “Education Facing Contemporary World Issues”, 7th - 9th November 2014

Research on the usefulness of Feuerstein Method in educating the sociability of children aged between 3 and 7 (preschool children)

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Abstract

The Feuerstein method is classified as a cognitive intervention method that does not neglect the socio-emotional development of those involved. The 14 tools or instruments that are part of the Method have their own teaching didactics and can be used both individually and in a group, in a classroom or in a psychologist's office. Our research aims at highlighting the importance of family and school in the socialization of children aged between 3 and 7 years, as well as the usefulness of the Feuerstein Instrumental Enrichment Program in improving the educational and emotional deficiencies of children and the optimization of their social skills education.

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Peer-review under responsibility of The Association “Education for tomorrow” / [Asociatia “Educatie pentru maine”].

Key-words: cognitive intervention, socio-emotional development, sociability, social skills education, emotional deficiencies, optimization

1. Introduction

Our research aims at highlighting the importance of family and school in the socialization of children aged between 3 and 7 years, as well as the usefulness of the Feuerstein Instrumental Enrichment Program in improving the educational and emotional deficiencies of children and the optimization of their social skills education. It is found that under the conditions of the contemporary life, the child has been affected ever since infancy by *the*

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insufficient education received from parents in terms of the need for age-appropriate care and without *specialized psychological intervention* when there are emotional or educational deficiencies.

Under these conditions, a good knowledge of the child's needs and the educator's or psychologist's intervention using the Feuerstein Instrumental Enrichment Program, can settle conflicts of children with themselves and with others, and can properly prepare them for social life. (Skuy, 2002)

More than six decades ago Professor Reuven Feuerstein discovered the Theory of Mediated Learning which he operationalized developing a valuable program known as the Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment Program. Since then this program has been successfully used in over 30 countries worldwide and in the our research also.(Todor, 2014)

Although he emphasizes rather quite enough the *cognitive* aspects of changeability, Feuerstein does not ignore at all the *affective-motivational* and social aspects. Cognition and emotion are two sides of the same coin, says Piaget.(Feuerstein, 1996)

Feuerstein considers cognition as the "royal road" of changing the function of the individual. Once the individual has been provided with an adequate vocabulary, with accuracy and comparative behavior, with good hypothetical thinking and correct ways to draw conclusions, it shall be able to gain more emotional insight and other experiences. Cognition must reach motivation. Due to mediation and acquisition of mediated learning experience "difficult children" often completely change their behavior. The Instrumental Enrichment Program (namely IE) is a set of instruments systemically composed that create mediated learning experiences.(Feuerstein,2006)

2. Study data

The general objective of this research is to highlight the effects of affective and educational deficiencies in educating sociability in preschool children.

The specific objectives of this research are:

O₁ – study of the family context and the characteristics of families of children with sociability problems (deviant and pre-delinquent behaviour, school problems, behaviour disorders);

O₂ – revealing the relationship between the type of socialization problem and the family networking features.

O₃ - determining specific educational practices and characterisation of educational styles of families whose children have socialization problems;

O₄ – capturing existing problems in families whose children have socialization problems.

Hypothesis of the research

- we assume that for the children aged between 3 and 6 years, their neglect by their parents causes behaviour and adaptive disorders.
- we assume that the lack of affection is a predictor of behavioural/adaptive disorders in children.
- we anticipate that following the process of psychotherapeutic intervention, children who have educational deficiencies develop certain adaptation skills to cope with changes related to the problems they face.
- we assume that there are significant differences between the study group and the control group in terms of behaviour-adaptive dysfunctions of children with educational deficiencies.

Group of subjects

The group of subjects consists of a number of 26 children who spend less than 3 hours per day with their parents.

Remark: we mention that, at this stage, we were not interested in social/familial causes leading to neglect, except for identifying the absence of one parent or of both parents.

Research instruments and methods: In our research we have used the following

1. **Methods:** Questionnaire. Psycho-pedagogical observation. Biographical method

2. **Working tools:**

- Identification sheet on the situation of the child neglected by the parents;
- **NEPSY battery** is applied to children with ages between 3 and 12 years. This is a complex instrument, created to assess the neuropsychological development of preschool and school children. NEPSY assesses the development of neuropsychological functions in five functional domains:

- Attention / Executive functions;
 - Language;
 - Sensorimotor functions;
 - Visuo-spatial functions;
 - Memory and learning. (a.)
- **“Family drawing” test;** The family drawing offered an even deeper image on emotional and relational maturity of preschool children. The children sent messages and explanations that they could not express verbally.

Research methodology:

Of the 26 children, 13 children were selected to be part of the study group and 13 children were included in the control group, with the same characteristics as those in the study group. The selection criteria for both groups were: inappropriate behaviour in the group, without mental deficiency and test scores positioning them within the limits for the following syndromes: *focus disorders, anxiety / depression, aggressive behaviour, aggressive behaviour violating the rules, emotional problems, oppositional behaviour, adaptive skills and functioning, conduct problems*.

Based on the results obtained in the second stage of the research, we developed an intervention model for counselling children with behavioural disorders and adjustment difficulties. The psychotherapeutic intervention program was divided into 16 sessions, in which Mediated Learning strategies were used, designed to address the children's needs. Feuerstein Method Instruments were partially used, namely: identification of emotions, from empathy to action and organization of points.

In the last stage of the research after the study group completed the psychotherapeutic program, we performed a new psychological assessment, this time on the 26 participants, 13 in the study group and 13 in the control group, performing a comparative analysis both intragroup and intergroup, in order to highlight the effectiveness of psychotherapeutic program for the children.

Research results

In this research, the results obtained from the application of tests on the investigated subjects, revealed that the parents of children included in the sample do not know well enough the problems their children face, showing significant differences between the assessment we made, together with the school psychologist and the data provided by the parents on the following behavioural dysfunctions: * loneliness / depression; somatic complaints; oppositional behaviour; focus problems; aggressive behaviour.

Table no.1: Results of dysfunctions' assessment at behavioural level

Behavioural dysfunctions	Parents' assessment	Teacher's assessment
loneliness/depression;	57.89%	37.12%
Somatic complaints;	54.33%	14.21%
Oppositional behaviour;	12.78%	74.12%
Focus problems;	1.03%	58.17%
Aggressive behaviour	15.27%	87.14%

After centralizing the data we found that parents do not have enough knowledge of the problems faced by their children nor of the effects of their neglect on their behaviour.

Parents undervalued social behavioural problems of their children compared to the observations we made, but in terms of emotional problems, they reported more problems than those identified.

For socializing problems, the test scores and parents' views are similar, as they identify in their children problems consisting of violation of rules, and aggressive behaviours, which include: disobedience, stubbornness, emotional instability, tantrums, destruction of other children personal belongings or their own things, unkindness, etc.

Given the fact that following the comparative analysis we obtained both agreement and disagreement areas between the evaluators, we can appreciate that the first two hypotheses were confirmed, meaning that the absence of affection is a predictor of behavioural/adaptive disorders in children and the neglect of children aged between 3-6 years by their parents generate behavioural-adaptive dysfunctions.

Table no.2: Results of maladaptive behaviour assessment by gender

Maladaptive dysfunctions	Girls	Boys
Anxiety	76.12%	23.88%
Violation of rules	39.15%	60.85%
Aggressive behaviour	23.87%	76.13%
Communication	64.35%	35.65%
Focus problems	47.24%	52.76%

Not only theoretically, but also practically, children neglected by their parents show gender differences in terms of their problems. Girls are more anxious, more depressed, sometimes complaining about somatic problems, but also show other problems, such as social, thinking, focus problems or even the violation of rules, taking into account that they obtained higher scores than boys.

Based on the scores of psychological investigations we can say that neglected boys have more socialization problems than girls, while they have more problems with anxiety and communication.

It should be noted that parents of children with social and integration difficulties did not observe the existence of emotional problems to correlate with neglect, problems identified and referred by us. Increased attention from parents about the attitudes and behaviours of their children would have led to the identification of those emotional issues that we observed.

In terms of attention, focusing problems are equally common among boys and girls, without significant differences.

The group of children included in psychotherapeutic program was composed of seven boys, aged between 3-6 years and 6 girls aged 3-6 years.

The purpose of the psychotherapeutic program is to reveal the problems of psycho-traumatic experiences in children neglected by their parents, to help them integrate into the play group in kindergarten and to reduce the risk of developing conduct disorders.

Children need to develop a proper perception of reality, both on themselves and on others, to learn different self-control techniques and alternatives to opposing and violation of rules behaviours they manifested before, to practice and to extrapolate them to everyday life. They will acquire in the psychotherapeutic program social skills in circumstances similar to reality.

The results revealed that there were significant differences between the scores obtained by children in the assessment conducted before the psychotherapeutic intervention and after this intervention.

Table no. 3: The comparative analysis of maladaptive behaviours related to psychotherapeutic program

Maladaptive behaviour	Before applying the program	After applying the program
Loneliness/depression	37.12%	12.05%
Somatic complaints	14.21%	2.34%
Focus problems	58.17%	14.56%
Violation of rules	68.97%	25.08%
Aggressive behaviour	87.14%	13.47%
Oppositional behaviour	74.12%	21.06%
Self-esteem	83.03%	37.68%

The results of the comparative analysis indicate that there are significant differences between the children in the study group and those in the control group in terms of their behaviour and emotional states.

Table no. 4: Comparative analysis of assessments conducted on the study group and on the control group

Maladaptive behaviour	Study group	Control group
Loneliness/depression	12.05%	26.12%
Somatic complaints	2.34%	8.10%
Focus problems	14.56%	75.17%
Violation of rules	25.08%	54.67%
Aggressive behaviour	13.47%	75.24%

Oppositional behaviour	21.06%	65.03%
Self-esteem	37.68%	63.76%

The statistical analysis performed allowed the identification of significant statistical differences between the group of children participating in the psychotherapeutic group and the group of children who did not participate in psychotherapeutic program, in terms of behavioural-adaptive dysfunctions of these children. Those who have completed the psychotherapeutic program have learned some skills that help them overcome easier the consequences of parental neglect.

Based on the results obtained in the comparative analysis between the study group and the control group on behavioural-adaptive dysfunctions of children, and on self-esteem, we can say that the fourth hypothesis was confirmed, with significant statistically differences between the study group and the control group. We are entitled to say that the psychotherapeutic program that we created and implemented on children was effective, the effect being visible on the results obtained in the comparative analyses performed.

The model of psychotherapeutic intervention program that we have created and implemented on children temporarily "abandoned" by their parents, proved to be effective in improving the problems identified in these children, and in some cases even contributed to their disappearance, children adapting to the existing reality.

After completing the psychotherapeutic intervention program, a post-assessment is performed, and for children who still have some integration issues, be they emotional or behavioural, individual therapy is recommended, together with their parents.

3. Conclusions

Following the methodological approach we can state that the research objectives have been met and that the assumptions were confirmed. Based on the investigation of changes in integration and adaptation to the social and school environment of children neglected by their parents, we sought to identify those children at risk of developing behavioural disorders and to develop a psychotherapeutic intervention program in which to engage children who show the greatest risk of developing maladaptive behaviours.

After analysing the data we have shown that often the educational deficiencies generate dysfunctions both within the behavioural and in the emotional area. Regardless of the form or cause of education errors, the particular problem is that of the child with adjustment difficulties who will face emotional deficiencies and their consequences.

Child neglect for a variable period of time, generates a sense of abandonment with repercussions on children's personality. Depending on the length of negligence, there may be a number of issues related to ensuring the specific needs of the child and the risk of occurrence of intellectual deficits and / or emotional and behavioural disorders. Worst maladaptive behaviours and that degenerate often in aggressive reactions are based on acute affective instability.

This puts the child in the situation of not finding a way to cope in conditions of relative difficulty and the reaction occurs under the impression of unpredictability, of lack of control and taking a decision which ignores the effects of his/her behaviour. Frustration emphasizes emotional conflicts and the already limited possibilities of the child to refrain the initial impulses.

The desire for affirmation causes them to commit antisocial acts to attract attention to themselves. In contrast, those dominated by a depressive mood exhibit restlessness, on a background of sadness without reason. They are dissatisfied with the way people behave around them, they reject and revile them, looking for a way to adapt by isolating from them.

Failures, no matter how small, are experienced dramatically and, through a permanent refusal to participate in the efforts of the group they belong to, they isolate themselves from others. At intellectual level they become negativist, concerned about exaggerate analysis of the situation, do not take into account the essential facts and fail to organize information in a well-defined system. At the affective-motivational level their goals are not ranked by social and situational importance, but the intensity of inner feelings is not in all cases fit to the significance of the stimulus.

Younger children feel more acutely the emotional deficiencies if they have not made a secure bond with their parent. Learning, work, happiness, appropriate behaviours are not classified by educators as being normal, there are some problems identified in these areas.

The results of our research complement other researches on gender differences in case of maladaptive behaviours and on behavioural problems in general. Boys show more behavioural problems than girls, and girls show more anxiety problems, loneliness or somatic complaints than boys (Fernandez, 2008).

The results obtained in the final evaluation after cessation of group psychotherapy sessions, demonstrate that the program implemented on children was effective, showing that there are differences between the assessments obtained before psychotherapeutic intervention, and the final assessment after completion of group therapy, but also between the assessments made on children in the study group and on those in the control group.

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